

24 APRIL 1971

CIA 4.02 U-2
Sec. 4.01.2 Operation Overflight

The fall guy

OPERATION OVERFLIGHT

By Francis Gary Powers with Curt Gentry.

Hodder and Stoughton. 375 pages. £2.50.

After being shot down in the Urals in May, 1960, Mr Powers, the pilot of the most famous of the U-2 aircraft that preceded today's "spy satellites," spent 21 months as the Russians' prisoner before being part-exchanged for their equally celebrated spy, Colonel Rudolf Abel. After his release his former employers in the Central Intelligence Agency effectively discouraged him from writing about his experiences until 1968, when they consented to his undertaking the book which he and Mr Gentry have now produced. Rather generously, Mr Powers acknowledges that the delay has enabled him to tell his story more fully—though even now he omits, as he recalls he did when interrogated by the Russians, many points which they would still probably like to know more about.

Much has certainly changed since Mr Khrushchev, staging one of his alarming but deftly controlled tantrums, extricated himself from the 1960 summit project and cancelled Mr Eisenhower's visit to Russia on the ground that Mr Powers's overflight of that country had been an intolerable action. The truth, at that time, was that the Russians had known of the U-2 overflights for several years, but had never complained about them. Instead they concentrated on developing means of shooting down the high-flying reconnaissance aircraft, and their feat in May, 1960, meant that the Americans could no longer use this method of redressing the imbalance of secrecy between the two super powers. Today's calm acceptance on both sides of mutual surveillance by photographic satellites contrasts ironically with the Russians' hullabaloo 11 years ago. True, Mr Powers argues that the U-2 could still do some things better than any satellite, but one must allow for his professional loyalty as a pilot to this strangely beautiful jet-powered glider. In 1962 he went back to flying U-2s as a test pilot for Lockheed, and had a few more "close calls," as he puts it.

He does not complain that he was required to try to fly the 3,800 miles from Peshawar across Russia to Norway in a plane that revealed several malfunctions. He does complain that the U-2 pilots got no guidance at all about



Powers in Moscow: awaiting sentence

the possibility of capture, except an intelligence officer's offhand advice to "tell them everything"—advice which Mr Powers declined to follow. His account of his experiences in Russia is only too credible; it includes the usual "counsel for the defence" who, at the show trial, devoted himself to assisting the prosecution, and the usual revelations of obsessive Soviet bureaucracy inside as well as outside the prison system. Equally credible is his story of the somewhat schizophrenic way the American authorities treated him after his release, when he was alternately laden with commendations and left to play something of a scapegoat role. Inevitably his book contains a vein of self-justification, but this is not strong enough to obscure the interest of the narrative. And when he speculates, he does so explicitly and cautiously; for example, when he discusses the possibility that Lee Harvey Oswald may have informed the Russians about the altitudes at which the U-2s flew when he went to Moscow in 1959 after working as a radar operator at the Atsugi base in Japan while the aircraft were flying from there. Mr Powers's fateful flight was only the second U-2 flight over Russia after Oswald's arrival there.